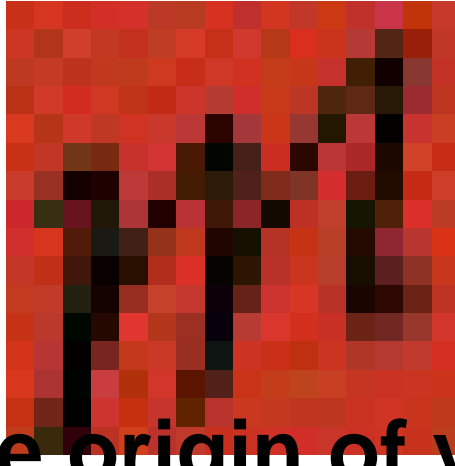


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# XXX.3 The origin of vassalage

- The Spirit of Law - Book XXX. Theory of feudal laws among the Franks, in the relation they have to the establishment of the monarchy -

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### XXX.3 The origin of vassalage

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Cæsar says that the Germans did not attach themselves to agriculture ; that most of them lived on milk, cheese, and flesh ; that no one had any land or limits that were his own ; that the princes and magistrates of each nation gave to individuals the portion of land they wished, and in the place they wished, and obliged them the year following to go elsewhere. [1] Tacitus says that each prince had a band of men who attached themselves to him and followed him. [2] This writer, who in his language gives them a name related to their state, calls them companions. [3] There was among them a singular emulation for obtaining some distinction with the prince, and the same emulation among the princes over the number and bravery of their companions. Tacitus adds :

It is the dignity, the authority of being always surrounded by a crowd of youths whom you have chosen ; it is an ornament in peace, it is a rampart in war. You become famous in your nation and among the neighboring peoples if you surpass the others in the number and courage of your companions ; you receive presents ; embassies come from all over. Often reputation decides the war. In combat, it is shameful for the prince to be inferior in courage ; it is shameful to the troop not to equal the prince in valor ; it is an eternal disgrace to have survived him. The most sacred engagement is to defend him. If a city-state is at peace, the princes go to the ones that are at war ; that is how they keep a large number of friends. They receive from them the warhorse and the terrifying javelin. Crude but plentiful repasts are a sort of pay for them. The prince supports his liberalities only by wars and rapine. You would be less likely to persuade them to till the soil and wait out the year than to challenge the enemy and receive wounds ; they will not acquire with sweat what they can obtain with blood [4]

Thus, among the Germans there were vassals and not fiefs : there were no fiefs, because the princes had no lands to distribute ; or rather the fiefs were war horses, weapons, and meals. There were vassals, because there were loyal men who were bound by their word, who were engaged for war, and who rendered about the same service as was later rendered for fiefs.

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[1] Book VI of *Gallic Wars*. Tacitus adds : *Nulli domus, aut ager, aut aliqua cura ; prout ad quem[que] venere aluntur (De moribus Germanorum [ch. xxxi]).*

[2] *De moribus Germanorum* [ch. xiii].

[3] *Comites*.

[4] *De moribus Germanorum* [ch. xiii-xiv].